

CHINESE MORTUARY PILLOWS
IN THE
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM
OF ARCHAEOLOGY

TORONTO
CANADA



BY HELEN E. FERNALD

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Among the ceramic wares in the Chinese collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, are about sixty mortuary pillows or head-rests. Most of these were acquired from Mr. George Crofts in the early days of American collecting, i.e. between 1918 and 1923. A few were purchased by Bishop White in 1926. I mention these collectors and dates because in the absence of authoritative information as to sites and periods of graves, this may at least suggest associations with other finds coming out at the same time. For all these head-rests were found in tombs, apparently, and the Crofts notes frequently allude to the "cemetery" from which they came. In the descriptions I have included such data for what it is worth, although at times it may seem misleading.

The belief persists that pottery pillows like these were used in ancient times by the living¹, and I have twice run across the statement that they were filled, according to the season, with hot or cold water. One author even adds "and fragrant herbs". It is true that these pillows are all hollow and could be filled with water and the small hole in the bottom or side plugged with a stopper. But the examples in the Museum at any rate

¹ They are known to be used by many people in many parts of China today.



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could never have held water, since they are not glazed inside or, with one exception, on the bottom, and would therefore be too porous. All of them could have been used by living persons, however, so far as their size and substantial character are concerned, and would certainly be cool in summer, and not too hard if properly adjusted to the sleeper's head or if covered with a thin cloth cushion. De Groot writes of the coffin pillow as "not differing from those in use among the living", and this has been interpreted to mean that the living used pillows of pottery like these found in the Sung graves.² But he was describing modern burial customs at this point and goes on to add, "This pillow is made of bamboo and wicker work."³ It is interesting to note that some of the Museum pillows are obviously imitations of "bamboo and wicker-work" (Figures 9, 21). Nevertheless there is literary evidence for the use of porcelain pillows by the living in the Sung Dynasty, and apparently these pillows were greatly prized by later generations, not only as "antiquities" but also for their supposed medicinal powers. The T'ao'shuo quotes a 16th century author as saying that "Ting-chou pillows of the Sung period, if only one foot long, were 'corpse pillows', but larger ones, used by the living, were efficacious in keeping the eyes clear and preserving the sight."⁴ It is therefore possible that some of the finer examples found in graves, like our Ting-chou ones, may have seen service among the living before their

² Hobson, Chinese Pottery and Porcelain, I, p. 105.

³ De Groot, The Religious System of China, I, p. 91.

⁴ Bushell, T'ao-shuo, p. 122.

consignment to the grave, although, according to our 18th century source quoted above, their size puts them in the category of "corpse pillows."

The majority of the pillows in the Museum collection are obviously of the Sung period. A large number were listed by Crofts as T'ang, but in the twenty-five or thirty years since then, some of the categories of Chinese ceramics have been changed. There is only one example in the collection which we deem undoubtedly T'ang. That is the miniature rectangular block with sagging top decorated with the formal rosette design familiar to us on T'ang plates and showing the same characteristic splashed green, cream, and amber-yellow lead glazes, (Figure 1). Indeed we cannot be sure that it was meant to be a pillow at all. An undisputable head-rest, in the shape of an oval plaque resting on the back of a reclining lion of Buddhist type, is probably T'ang but it is made of Ting-chou white marble, not pottery, (Figure 2).

The Sung pillows in our collection seem to fall into about ten groups, of which several belong to well known and even documented types. I will list them first very briefly, leaving details to the descriptions of individual examples.

1. Ting-chou, white porcelain body with transparent glaze; figures supporting head-rests. (Figure 3)
2. Chü-lu-hsien, Tz'u-chou type, white slip ware, incised over grey body, transparent glaze. "Petal pillows", with characteristic

stains from burial. Before 1108 A.D. The Museum has ten or more. (Figures 5, 6)

3. Lion Head type, with "three-color" lead glazes of the T'ang variety; amber-yellow, brown, cream, and black under transparent leaf-green glaze. Said to have come from Chü-lu-hsien, "same cemetery" as those of group 2. The Museum has two, and a variation. (Figures 7, 8)
4. "Hour-glass" pillow of square section with impressed floral and wicker design. The Museum has two. (Figure 9)
5. Tang-yang-yü } group I; pasty pink body
or Chiao-tso }
 - a. Kidney bean shape, with white slip and green, yellow and cream glazes. The Museum has seven of these. (Figures 10, 11)
 - b. Long rectangular box-like type, white slip ware of Tz'u-chou variety, with decoration incised and carved (graffiato). (Figure 12)
6. Tang-yang-yü } group II; chocolate brown body. Thick bean shaped
or Chiao-tso }

cushion form with incised floral design, white slip inlaid with brown under a transparent glaze. (Figure 13)
7. Tz'u-chou yao, "Chang Family Made" pillows of buff earthenware, kidney bean shape, painted with scenes in black on white slip, under transparent glaze. Said to have been made at Kuan-t'ai, about seven miles due west of Tz'u-chou on the south bank of

the Chang River. Stamped mark on base. The Museum has two examples. (Figure 15)

8. Yü-chou pillows, made in central Honan in late Sung, decorated with floral motifs in very black slip on very white creamy thick slip, under a very thin transparent glaze. (Figure 16)
9. Shansi, Fên-chou, thick oval cushion type, incised white slip ware over grey-pink body. (Figure 14)
10. Shansi. Figure-pillow type of unglazed red ware. (Figure 17)

SUNG-MING

11. Recumbent lion pillow, pale reddish clay covered with green glaze. (Figure 18)
12. Double-lion type, with cub or brocade ball between them. The Museum has four. (Figures 19, 20)

MING

13. Ming arched-bolster type, representing wicker-work with a leather cover. (Figure 21)

In the descriptions of the pillows which follow, the collector, year of acquisition, and the Museum acquisition number are stated. Shapes will not be described in detail since they can be seen in the illustrations. Bases are not ordinarily decorated or glazed or even covered with slip, although slip and glaze frequently round the edge onto the base.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE I

Figure 1

Rectangular pillow with sagging top. Hard pale buff pottery covered with "three color" lead glazes. Quatrefoil floral medallion deeply incised on top, the incised lines serving to separate the colors. Background and sides splashed with green, yellow-amber and cream glazes. T'ang.

L. 4.75" W. 3.65" H. 2.2"

Crofts, 1918-20

NA. 2676

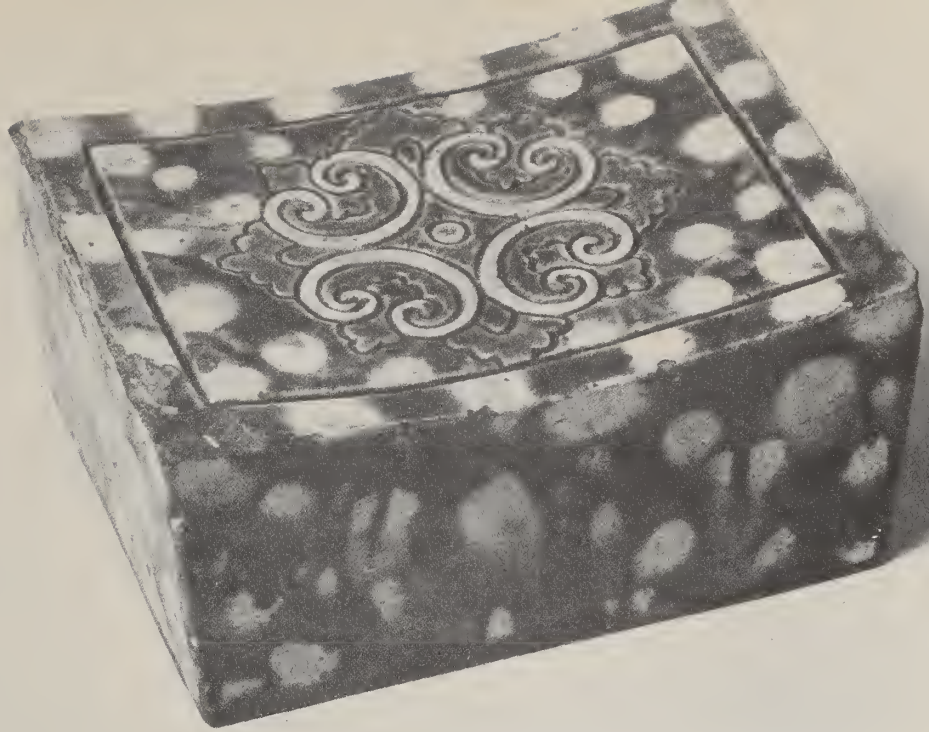
Figure 2

Stone pillow, of white Ting-chou marble. Brown and yellow stains from burial, and areas of gritty iron deposit apparently accumulated from the soil. The crouching lion is of the Buddhist type as seen on sculptures of the sixth century and T'ang. This has been attributed to the Six Dynasties, but the attitude of chin on paws is typical of the end of the T'ang period. End of T'ang or 10th cent.

L. 9.55" W. 7.75" H. 5"

Crofts, 1923

NB. 5801



(1)



(2)

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE II

Figure 3

Figure pillow of Ting-chou ware. Hard white porcelain covered with a transparent glaze of fine quality. Woman with tiny, bound (?) feet lying on a couch with a child at her side. Was much broken and the head-rest which the figure doubtless supported is missing. Repairs have been disguised by a coat of creamy white paint which has not yet been cleaned off and which obscures the design of the impressed medallion on the front of the couch. Reportedly from Chang-tê.

Sung.

L. 7.35" H. 3.7"

Crofts, 1920

NA. 2391

Figure 4

Figure pillow, Tz'u-chou ware in imitation of Ting. Hard light-grey stoneware of dense smooth quality. Creamy white slip and transparent glaze. Boy lying on a couch with huge stem rising from his body to support a curved leaf-shaped head-rest. The top bears a floral design incised free-hand through the white slip to the grey body. The figure is mould made, with impressed panels of floral design on the front of the couch. Said to be from Chang-tê.

Sung.

L. 8.5" H. 6.3"

Crofts, 1920

NA. 2394



(3)



(4)

The two following pillows, Figures 5 and 6, and nine others of this type, have a head-rest like a wide flower petal with ju-i outline, or, as some describe it, an ogival arch shape. Most of the group which these two represent show the typical yellow and brownish stains of the Chü-lu-hsien finds. They are all reported as having been found in the "new cemetery near Shêntê Fu" (Shun-tê fu), identified as Chü-lu-hsien. Crofts says it covered an area about "fifteen miles in diameter, which, however, was not all occupied by graves. This was in September, 1922, and he added that this source of mortuary pillows was practically "finished" and the collection of eight (there were four more of this kind in an earlier shipment) were the last to come out. All are supported on plain oblong box-like bases. These pillows can be dated before 1108 A.D. when the site was overwhelmed by flood and abandoned.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE III

Figure 5

"Petal Pillow", Tz'u-chou type, light-grey, almost putty colored stoneware covered with a white slip. Free-hand design incised through the slip to the grey body and a transparent glaze over the whole. The decoration is a large character, jen, 𠂔, meaning "to be patient, to endure", in a marvellously big bold simple design.

N. Sung.

L. 11.9" H. 7.4"

Crofts, 1923

NA. 2393

Figure 6

"Petal Pillow", Tz'u-chou type, same shape, material and technique as Figure 5. The incised design is very typical of this type, a large flower (peony?) on each side of which rises a tall pointed leaf. All grow from a stem which crosses the field almost horizontally. A huge leaf from the end of the stem curves back to fill the space below it.

N. Sung.

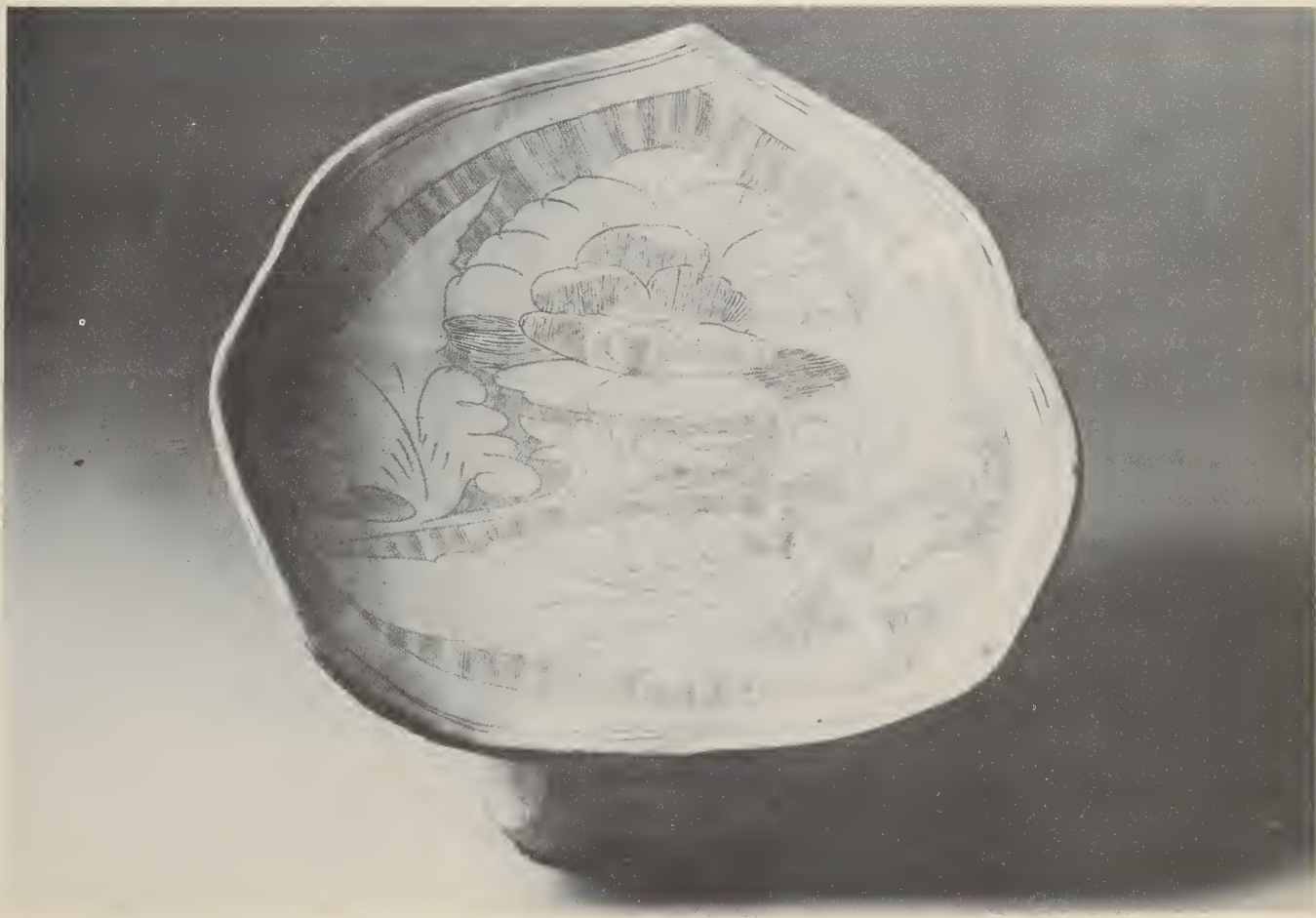
L. 12" H. 7"

Crofts, 1923

NA. 2388



(5)



(6)

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE IV

Figures 7 and 8

"Lion Head pillows of hard and heavy pale buff pottery covered with three-color lead glazes of the T'ang variety. We show the powerfully modelled face of the lion, with its rich golden-amber glaze and deep brown eyeballs (Figure 7), and because the top, the head-rest plaque, has been broken off (the dealer trimmed the top and painted it with sealing-wax green!) we show the head-rest from another lion pillow (Figure 8). This ogival plaque bears an incised floral design typical of early Sung Tz'u-chou type of ware, being painted in black under a transparent leaf green glaze, now worn and a bit rough from burial (and perhaps cleaning). There is no evidence of a slip, the body being pale enough without it. The glaze is finely crazed all over. Crofts recorded that these pillows also came from the "new cemetery" near Shun-tê-fu, and he dated them T'ang. There are obvious T'ang characteristics like the strong modelling, the three color lead glazes and even the manner of the floral design which is similar to that on some engraved stone lintels and doorways of T'ang date. The third pillow of this group (which we do not show) has a similar black and green head-rest plaque but instead of the lion head there is a sort of pillar decorated in high relief by a rinseau of pomegranates smothered in a multitude of scroll petals and palmette leaves, all glazed in an even golden yellow. Probably late 10th cent.

Fig. 7	L. 9.8" H. 5.3"	Crofts, 1923	NA. 2562
Fig. 8	L. 10.9" H. 5.9"	Crofts, 1922	NA. 2576

Figure 9

Hour-glass shaped pillow but square at the ends and in section. Hard-fired pale buff clay; made by plaquette technique (Shirae and Cox, Oriental Art, Vol. II, No. 2, 1949). Impressed design, the same on all four sides, of pomegranates, flower, foliage and fruit, in a long quatrefoil medallion against a background of lattice alternating with rinseau in the corners. Ends are plain, one having a small round hole in the middle, the other showing three spur marks and two large "drops" of green glaze. No slip. Green and yellow glaze (lead?) applied in lengthwise stripes of green across the top, bottom and middle of each side, blending into yellow between. The ends show yellow with cross bars of green from corner to corner. The Museum has another of this shape in Ying-ch'ing ware, with relief design of babies amid foliage. Sung.

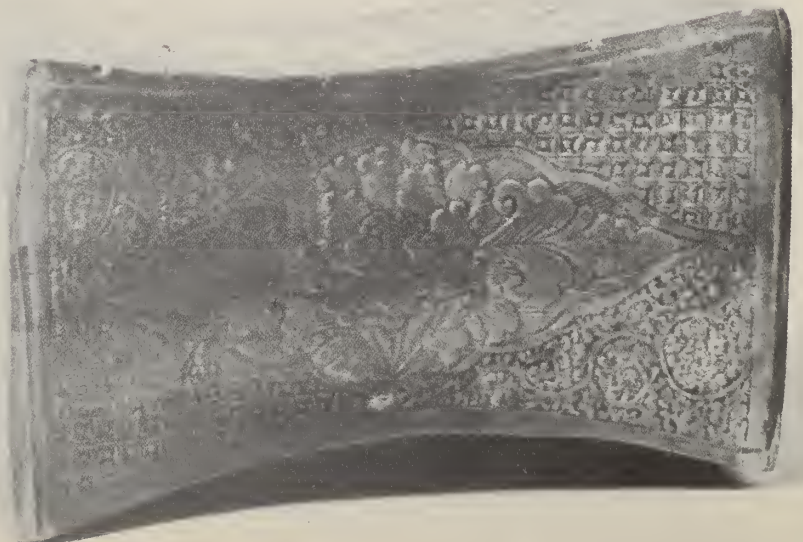
L. 7.5" Ends 4.5" sq.	Crofts, 1918	NA. 962
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(7)



(8)



(9)

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE V

Figure 10

Bean shaped pillow; a fairly soft smooth red clay, here of a pasty pastel pink, like icing on a birthday cake. Soft green and yellow lead glazes over a thin white slip, and apparently a colorless glaze over the white of the panel but this glaze is now almost entirely disintegrated. Semi-circular panel contains a deeply incised flower decoration in yellow and green on white. Yellow over the combed frame makes the incised lines, where they expose the pink clay ground, a yellow brown. Outer frame a brilliant leaf green, with free-hand wavy incised scrolls and heavy line around the edge. Black has been painted down into these lines before covering with green. The green extends only half way down the sides. Another combed band, filled with black, runs around the pillow near the upper edge. Glaze finely crazed all over. It has been reported that pillows of this ware were made at Tang-yang-yü, not far from Chiao-tso near the Shansi border. Of four other examples in the Museum, one has a white flower on yellow background.

L. 12" Ht. 3.5"

Crofts, 1918

NA. 2575

Figure 11

Bean shaped pillow: same material and technique as Figure 10 but probably later in date. Green glaze, slightly more cucumber in shade, extends over the whole cushion and down to the base. Around the upper edge it is worn off, revealing the white slip and red (pink) clay beneath. The lines of the incised design in the panel are painted with black. The green glaze filling in the flowers does not always come to the edge of the deeply incised lines but leaves a little white slip exposed there sometimes. Glaze finely crazed all over. The Museum has two examples. Late Sung.

L. 13" W. 9.5" H. 4.5"

Bishop White, 1926

NA. 1191

Figure 12

Long rectangular block pillow, reddish stoneware. This pillow shows well how each side and end plaque was moulded separately before they were all fitted together. The top panel overhangs the front, back and the left side. Over the red clay on the top of the pillow is a layer of fine mouse-grey clay about one sixteenth of an inch thick and it has been hurriedly smeared on the sides, too, in certain areas. Decoration is of the Tz'u-chou type, incised and carved (graffiato) through a white slip to the layer of grey clay. The floor of the graffiato work may have received some extra filling of grey before the pillow was covered with yellowish transparent glaze. This pillow shows faulty firing, for the glaze has boiled and bubbled and run in brownish streaks, greenish over some bare spaces of white slip and with blue-grey discoloration on areas of the biscuit. Sung.

L. 17" W. 7" H. 6"

Bishop White, 1926

NA. 1177



(10)



(11)



(12)

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE VI

Figure 13

Bean shaped cushion pillow; fine chocolate brown body with a layer of lighter grey clay over the top fired to a very hard stoneware. Floral panel design and band deeply incised in the clay before a thick creamy white slip was run over the whole, including the base, as if to cover all signs of the dark body. The incised lines were then painted, almost "inlaid", with a chocolate brown filling and the background was covered with an all-over "fish-roe" pattern of small circles painted on the slip free-hand, but very precisely, in the same chocolate brown. Then the transparent colorless glaze was applied rather thickly, stopping a little short of the base. There is a very fine crackle, with areas of crackle stain in brown or slate grey on the side and back. According to Mr. Hochstadter, Early Chinese Ceramics, Buffalo Museum of Science, Figures 97, 98, this was a variety made at Tang-yang-yü.

Sung.

L. 8.5" W. 6.2" H. 3.5"

Bishop White. 1926

NA. 1188

Figure 14

Oval cushion pillow, pale greyish-red stoneware, with creamy white slip. Incised design on top: a creeping baby in a sun-suit surrounded by flower petals, scrolls, and a floral rinceau, on sides are flower and leaf panels, all in free-hand except for the background of tiny circles, which in this case appear to have been stamped with a small cylindrical cutter. The transparent glaze is a faint straw color. Where it covers the reddish body exposed by the lines of the design it makes those lines a yellow brown. Near the base the faintly colored glaze runs to greenish "tear-drops". This yellowish transparent glaze seems to be a characteristic of Tz'u-chou style wares made in Shansi. Crofts says this pillow came from Lo-yang. A more recent suggestion is that it was made at Fên-chou, Shansi. There is another Shansi one of this kind in the collection.

Sung.

L. 10.5" H. 4.9"

Crofts, 1918

NA. 2389



(13)



(14)

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE VII

Figure 15

Tz'u-chou pillow, "Made by the Chang Family", light buff stoneware, painted in black on a white slip under a transparent glaze. Kidney bean shape with ju-i head outline and pointed at the top. Heavy black bordered panel containing a delightful drawing of a little girl with a big lotus leaf driving a duck. Below the wide border of leaves and lines, a freely sketched palmette scroll design decorates the front and sides. Base, unglazed, shows long milky-grey "tear-drops" of glaze at the edge and areas of discoloration. The stamped mark on the base has the raised characters Chang Chia Tsao (張家造) reading horizontally within a double-lined rectangle. The Chang family appears to have made pillows for centuries. The Museum has another almost identical one but smaller, the figure not so well drawn, and without the duck. Sung.

L. 13.75" H. 6.2"

Crofts, 1918

NA. 2395

Figure 16

Pillow, a rectangular block with corners cut off. Typical Tz'u-chou type. A possible origin at Yü-chou, Honan, has been suggested. Of dense light grey porcelain, a very thick pure white slip and very black floral painted design including a white flower on top, inside wide black borders. The transparent glaze is very thin giving an effect of opacity and satiny surface. Base discolored buff by burial, and where the glaze rounds the base edge it shows some gummy grey drops. Sung.

L. 10.5" H. 4"

Crofts, 1920

NA. 2390



(15)



(16)

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE VIII

Figure 17

Figure pillow with head-rest plaque missing. Reclining boy holding a pet cat in his arms. Large lotus flower and two lotus leaves rising from his body must have once supported the head-rest itself. Heavy reddish stoneware, unglazed, surface polished and looks like stone, having a faint gloss or sheen. Crofts says "from Fêng-chên, Shansi", but as this is outside the Great Wall and Fên-chou Shansi is believed to have been a great center for manufacture of Sung pillows, the latter seems to be the more likely place.

Sung.

L. 13.5" H. 6.3"

Crofts, 1918

NA. 2563

Figure 18

Pillow in the shape of a recumbent lion. Pale reddish pottery covered with a cucumber-green glaze minutely crazed. Lines and angles of the relief have been outlined with black under the glaze, as around the eyes, nostrils, ears, mane and hair of the tail. The pupils of the eyes are gleaming black. No slip. Base in the biscuit reddish and brown. These are sometimes called "tiger pillows" but the form is definitely developed from the Buddhist lion and moreover the mane is indicated. Crofts dated this T'ang.

Probably end of Sung or early Ming.

L. 11.2" H. 4"

Crofts, 1918

NA. 963



(17)



(18)

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE IX

Figure 19

Double lion pillow with cub between the two heads. Tz'u-chou ware, light grey (almost putty-colored) stoneware with heavy creamy white slip and transparent glaze. Eyes of the lions and the cub touched with a greenish brown glaze under the colorless one. The top is a plain more or less oval plaque.

Late Sung, or Ming.

L. 9.5" H. 4"

Crofts, 1918

NA. 1977

Figure 20

Double lion pillow with beribboned ornament between the two heads. Pink-buff stoneware covered with soft lead glazes of the T'ang three-color variety: yellow-amber, cream and green. Eyes, edges of mouths, entire upper lips, ears, etc. touched with deep amber red-brown. The head-rest plain on top and a beautiful even golden-amber yellow. Fine crazing all over.

Late Sung, or Ming.

L. 10.25" W. 6.25" H. 4.75"

Bishop White, 1926

Figure 21

Pillow in shape of an arched cylindrical bolster of wicker-work with a leather cover. Flat on the bottom and with flat ends. Very red clay, showing impressed design of swastikas in squares in imitation of wicker-work and with the edges of the arches representing the bamboo frame. No slip. Covered with a brilliant opaque blue-green glaze which is chipping off on the edges, as Ming glaze on stoneware is so likely to do. A tripartite zig-zag band with lopped off points impressed around the base. Base underneath unglazed, with two large round holes.

Ming

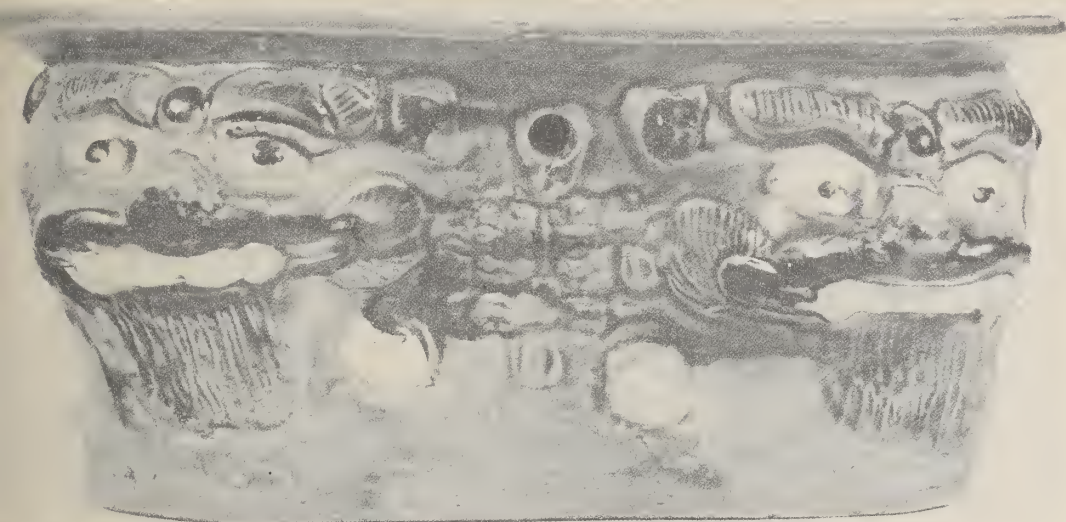
L. 11" W. 5" H. 5.6"

Bishop White, 1926

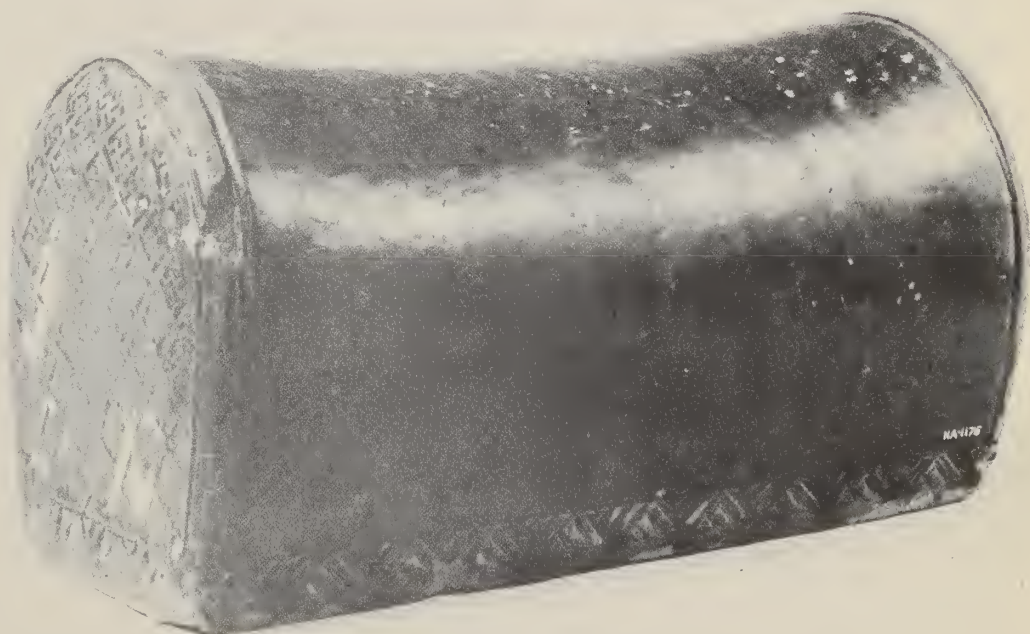
NA. 1176



(19)



(20)



A Sketch Map
for
"Chinese Mortuary
Pillows" in the Royal
Ontario Museum of
Archaeology

